

WHAT BECAME OF SEAL OF CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA?

History of Its Strange Disappearance Is Related by Judge Walter A. Montgomery.

(Special to The Times-Dispatch.)
Washington, October 11.—The story that James Jones, coachman of Jefferson Davis, while he was President of the Confederacy, and now employed at the United States Senate, disposed of the seal of the Confederate States at the command of Jones. There is a hallucination of Jones. There is at present a sufficiency of available evidence to show that Admiral Thomas O. Selfridge, of the United States Navy, retired, secured the seal in 1873 from Colonel John T. Pickett, the first Confederate Commissioner to Mexico, and if he has not disposed of it he must have it still.

This remarkable statement was made to The Times-Dispatch correspondent by Judge Walter A. Montgomery, formerly of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, who has been in Washington for a year collecting data for a history of the civil administration of the Confederate States, including their diplomatic relations, which he is writing.

In 1900 James Jones, a negro, who worked for Jefferson Davis, and who has been employed in the stationery room of the Senate for many years, started a story to the effect that his master had given him the seal when leaving Richmond, and that he had buried it where it would never be found.

Jones said that Mr. Davis had ordered him to hide the seal where it would never be found by the United States authorities, and that he had carried out the orders of his master, with the result that the seal would never come to light.

Jones is a darky of the old school, and has been carried on the pay roll of the Senate because of his faithfulness to his former master. An attempt to remove him on account of total disability, at the last session of Congress, brought from Senator John Sharp Williams a stinging rebuke to those who wished to separate him from his monthly check.

No Credence in Story.
"It seems strange that any thoughtful person would give the least credence to Jones' statement," continued Judge Montgomery, "because the evacuation of Richmond, though sudden, was not unexpected by Mr. Davis, his cabinet, or General Lee.

"Preparations had been made to meet great quantities of government property, including machinery for various manufacturing purposes, the government archives, books and papers, having been removed to places of safety. There was no intention to abandon the contest at that time. The lines of retreat and defense had been agreed upon by Mr. Davis and General Lee, and at Danville all the departments of the government were opened for business. Mr. Davis issued a proclamation to the country declaring that more determined resistance, and that

his position had been strengthened by the withdrawal from Richmond.

"At Charlotte, even after Lee and Johnston had surrendered, Mr. Davis was defiant and insisted upon protracting the war beyond the Mississippi. It would not, therefore, have been consistent for him to have ordered the hiding of the seal upon the evacuation of Richmond if he was sincere in his Charlotte and Danville proclamations. "If, however, Mr. Davis knew that the Confederate cause was lost when the government abandoned Richmond and determined to hide the seal, why should he have chosen a servant for the work instead of one of his faithful friends and aids who surrounded him?

"Then again, the seal did not belong to Mr. Davis's office and he had no physical control of it. By Section 2 and act of Confederate Congress No. 21—"To organize the Department of State"—it was declared "that it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to keep the Great Seal of the Confederate States and to make out and record all papers of State and to affix said seal."

Was Not in Richmond.
"And finally, Jones was not in Richmond when the city was evacuated.

"Colonel Burton Harrison, in the Century Magazine for November, 1884—"The Capture of Jefferson Davis"—wrote that he left Richmond at 10 o'clock at night, Friday, before evacuation, Sunday, April 2, in a special train of two or three coaches. His party consisted of Mrs. Davis, her sister, Miss Howell, her four children, Ellen, mulatto coachman. The daughters of Mrs. Trenholm were also in the party, and two carriage horses were taken along. "The party went direct to Charlotte, where they remained for a week or more and then all went to Abbeville, South Carolina, except Colonel Harrison, who returned to Mr. Davis at Danville.

"The history of the strange disappearance of the Confederate seal is as follows: On the 25th of March, 1865, five days before the evacuation of Richmond, J. P. Benjamin, Secretary of State, sent William J. Bromwell, disbursement clerk of the department, to Charlotte, North Carolina, with three boxes of the belongings of that department, where they were to be put in a place of safety.

"Bromwell, as he was ordered to do by Mr. Benjamin, stopped in Danville and got three trunks and four boxes of records and property of the State Department, which he had stored some weeks previously at the Danville Female College, under his superior's directions.

"He took the ten packages to Charlotte. He arrived there on April 1 and stored them in a room in the courthouse. Five days later he reported, in writing, to Mr. Benjamin that he had placed all of the boxes in six large



THE CONFEDERATE SEAL.

strong boxes which he had made in Charlotte. He said that he did not disturb the contents. He wrote, however, instead of having them marked Confederate States, Department of State, I concluded to have my own initials placed upon them in order to attract a little attention as possible.

"He reported that the boxes were numbered 1, 2, 3, 18, 19, and 20, and marked W. J. B. The trunks were marked J. P. B. D. F. Kenner and St. Martin. St. Martin was Mr. Benjamin's brother-in-law. Kenner was a mem-

ber of Congress from Louisiana and then in France, commissioned by Mr. Benjamin, with Mr. Davis's consent, to offer to the European nations emancipation of the slaves for recognition of the Confederate States. He had lived with Mr. Benjamin in Richmond.

Bought and Sold Curious.
"After the war Colonel Pickett settled in Washington, D. C., to practice law and at the same time engaged in buying and selling Confederate curios and records. In September, 1866, Bromwell, who was practicing law in

Richmond without success, accepted a proposition to enter Pickett's service.

"He wrote to Pickett as follows: I have now only to say that if you can offer me such a sum monthly as will enable me to support my little family of wife and child in an economical manner I will devote my best energies to the discharge of the duties I may be required to perform.

"Soon Pickett offered to sell the complete records of Mr. Benjamin's office to men of prominence and wealth in the South. Upon the refusal of any of them to buy, in 1868 he offered to sell to Secretary of State Seward "large and valuable documents of the late Confederate States, embracing all the papers belonging to Mr. Benjamin's office."

"Seward declined to buy except upon inspection in Washington, and further because the price, \$500,000, was excessive. Pickett said the papers were in Canada and refused to allow them to be brought to Washington for inspection.

"In July, 1872, they were bought by the United States government, by special act of Congress, for \$75,000. By the agreement of sale the papers were to be delivered in Canada, and Lieutenant Thomas O. Selfridge, U. S. N., was commissioned to receive them from Pickett. They were secured by Lieutenant Selfridge, inventoried by him, with remarks, delivered to the proper authorities, and are now in the Library of Congress and are known as the Pickett papers.

Denounced in South.
"When the sale was announced Pickett was denounced in the South for selling the archives of the Confederacy. On September 3, 1872, about a month after Pickett received the \$75,000, Bromwell made a declaration and certificate before N. Callan, in Washington, in substance as follows: That his, J. W. Bromwell's last official act of duty as an official of the Department of State of said Confederate States consisted in the packing up at Richmond, Virginia, about the last of March, 1865, of all the archives and so forth of the said Department of State and transporting them to a supposed place of safety in the South.

"That having complied fully with his instructions and having turned the said archives and so forth over to other officers of the said Confederate States, the fiduciary relations of the said deponent to said archives and so forth ended; and inasmuch as he, the deponent, shortly after renewed his allegiance to the United States he gave himself no further care with regard to said archives, and presumed that they had been captured by the United States forces.

"That he, the deponent, became aware some years later that the said archives had never come into the possession of the United States, but were spirited away by private parties, and that John T. Pickett, Esq., attorney-at-law at Washington, was employed by holders of said archives to negotiate their delivery to the United States government, should Southern and Northern Democrats refuse to take them.

"That deponent was privy to all of Mr. Pickett's negotiations, and he, Pickett, had given a truthful relation of the same, avoiding any breach of confidence, to the public press. He declared that Pickett had no fiduciary relations to the archives, that he dealt honestly with everybody connected with the matter, and although the entire sum of \$75,000 paid by the United States government for the archives was ultimately received by Mr. Pickett, he retained less than half of it for his own arduous, responsible, and valuable services.

"Soon after this declaration was published Bromwell went to Europe. In one of Pickett's letters to Bromwell in Paris, dated October 25, 1872, he stated: 'I am glad that you propose making a tour; it will be of inestimable advantage to you, giving you an entirely new set of ideas and expanding your views of life.' In another letter he states that he hopes he will make quite a tour and not return until with quite a new set of ideas.

"A sum of money was held in trust for Mrs. Bromwell by Colonel Pickett, and that Colonel Pickett was responsible for Mr. Bromwell's departure in

shown by later correspondence. In March of the following year Colonel Pickett wrote to the United States consul at Paris asking for information of Mr. Bromwell and said, 'We induced him to go abroad because of his habits as to drink.'

"Subsequently, Colonel Pickett wrote the consuls at many European ports in an effort to locate Mr. Bromwell and to hear from him personally, but the tenor of Colonel Pickett's letters indicate that no communication was had from him by Pickett or Mrs. Bromwell.

"In a letter of May 17, 1873, to Bromwell, Pickett wrote, 'You will wait a long time before lightning will strike you again; nor will you ever find another J. T. P. to utilize the treasure trove to your benefit.'

"Bromwell died in London in 1875, alone, broken in health and spirits. In February, 1876, Colonel Pickett wrote Mrs. Bromwell that he held \$469 in cash and \$9,000 in bonds, which he purposed turning over to her as her trustee."

Traces History of Seal.

Judge Montgomery then traced, with copies of the original papers before him, the history of the seal from the act of the Confederate Congress creating it on April 20, 1862, the letter of Mr. Benjamin ordering it to be made in England through Mr. Mason, Confederate commissioner to England; an itemized copy of the receipt given by the maker, Joseph S. Wyon, chief engraver to Her Majesty; letters showing its delivery to Mr. Benjamin by Lieutenant Chapman, of the Confederate navy in September, 1864, and the loss of a part of the fixtures at Bermuda. These fixtures were not recovered, and the seal could not be used without them.

Judge Montgomery is satisfied that the seal was in one of the boxes which Pickett took to Charlotte and that Pickett got the seal when the papers and records of the Department of State came into his possession.

"There is nothing in the record to show that Pickett agreed to sell or turn over to the United States the seal of the Confederate States."

At this point Judge Montgomery produced copies of letters from Pickett's letter book now in the Library of Congress with the Pickett papers to Captain Selfridge and correspondence between Pickett and S. H. Black, silversmith and electrotypist, of New York, bearing upon the possession of the seal by Captain Selfridge.

The letters between Pickett and Black are dated between May and September, 1873, and relate to Black's contract to make medals and electrotypes in bronze, silver, and gold from the Confederate seal. Large numbers of these medals were shipped by Black to Pickett in 1873 and large amounts of money in silver were sent by Pickett to Black in payment of his work.

Made From Original.

The medals were sold extensively throughout the South. One of these letters shows that the medals were made from the original seal. It is as follows, dated at New York, August 23, 1873, and addressed to John T. Pickett, Washington, D. C.:

"Dear Sir:
"Yours with check is at hand. Am much obliged, and shall now pay my indebtedness to all men in this business. Am sorry to hear that any one has thought of making any of these medals, and it is nothing but what I expected they would do. It is a pity that you could not get a right to sell them exclusively. I send you a letter which I received from St. Louis, Mo., the other day. Perhaps you had better write to him; they are too large for belt buckles.

"Any electrotypist can make them from one of the impressions better than he can from the original seal and much easier. My advice to you is to sell as soon as possible what you have got. You know that no one else in the country can get them made as cheap as I can make them and I have made them and will continue to make them. So if there is any sale at all rush it now, for some one will get the inside track of you if you don't."

"The two following letters from Pickett's letter book show that the seal was delivered to Lieutenant Selfridge, continued Judge Montgomery.

"Washington, D. C.,
"December 21, 1873."

"My Dear Captain:
"I am very glad to hear from you and quite envy your prospect of a speedy escape from that frozen region. It is frozen enough here. Do not forget our understanding as to my having a finger in that 'raging canal'

I am quite tired of sailing near the shore and fishing for archives and sardines. Now I have been intending writing you explanatory of delay, but it is ———. The aforesaid is yours as completely as if it were in your safe. But several little things have combined to interfere with my plans. One is that it has been traced to me. Don't they wish they may get it? When ready, I shall go to Boston, if necessary, to deliver it in person to Mrs. S. Bon voyage.
(Signed) "JOHN T. PICKETT."
"Capt. T. O. Selfridge, U. S. N., Boston, Mass."

"Washington, May 24, 1873.
"Captain T. O. Selfridge, U. S. N., Boston, Mass."

"My Dear Captain:
"Home again after a few days in York, Pa., and glad to find yours of the 21st. There is no danger of the aforesaid being known to be in your possession. In the public notice of it which I shall make, when my electrotypes shall be ready, a few weeks hence, it is my purpose to create the impression that I still hold the article. This will cause fun. You will only have to keep quiet, which, of course, you will do.

"I am quite sure that you are the thing to yourself—though you are the better judge of that. I presume that it will ultimately find its way into the possession of the government, where in default of the establishment of the so-called methods it should be. When you tire of the bauble let me know, as my old offer will hold good. When you see the electrotypes you will not care so much for the original. By the way, the electrotypist is Masonically pledged to secrecy.

(Signed) "JOHN T. PICKETT."
"On June 29, 1873, Colonel Pickett wrote to Colonel Charles C. Jones, Jr., of New York: 'I have been so fortunate as to rescue this memorial (the seal) from oblivion and possibly a vandal's meddling pot (it is pure silver and weighs several pounds). I have had several electrotypic impressions of it executed.' He sent Colonel Jones a medallion.

"This and other correspondence sustain his statement to Captain Selfridge that 'I intend to create the impression that I still hold the article.'
Genuineness Proven.

"In 1873, when the electrotypes of the Confederate seal were on the market, doubt was expressed by the public as to the genuineness of the seal when was supposed to be in Colonel Pickett's possession, whereupon Colonel Pickett sent a copy to J. S. and A. B. Wyon, of London, successors to Joseph S. Wyon, asking for an affidavit as to the genuineness of the impression.

"Messrs. Wyon forwarded to Colonel Pickett a certificate and declaration to the effect that the impression obtained of the seal was a faithful reproduction of the identical seal engraved in 1864 by J. S. Wyon. This declaration stated:

"It has been the invariable practice of our house to preserve proof impressions of all important seal work executed by us, and on a comparison of the impression now sent us with the proof impressions retained by us, we have no hesitation in asserting that as perfect an impression could not have been produced except from the original seal. We have never made any duplicate of the seal in question."

In conclusion Judge Montgomery said:
"In an article published in the Southern Historical Society Papers in 1868 it was stated that the seal of the Confederacy was overlooked by the Confederate authorities and afterwards fell into the hands of Colonel Pickett, who, after having a number of electrotypes made from it in copper, silver, and gold, presented the original to Colonel William E. Earle, of Washington, and that this gentleman presented it to the State of South Carolina. I have been informed reliably that Colonel Pickett did not give the seal to Mr. Earle, and I have been informed also on the best authority that the presentation spoken of was one of the medallions made by Mr. Black."

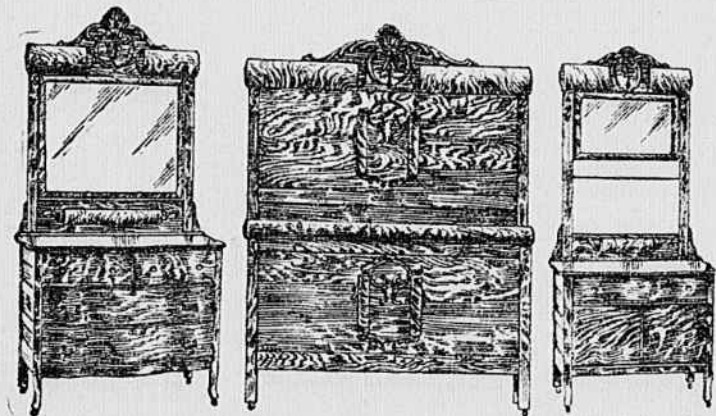
Judge Montgomery said further that he had seen a letter in a New York paper signed by W. McK. Darwood in which the writer stated that he visited Trinity College, Cambridge, and was shown the seal of the Confederacy, presented by Judah P. Benjamin, and that he had no doubt that it was still there.

An official inquiry proved that the seal in England was one of the medallions and not the original seal.

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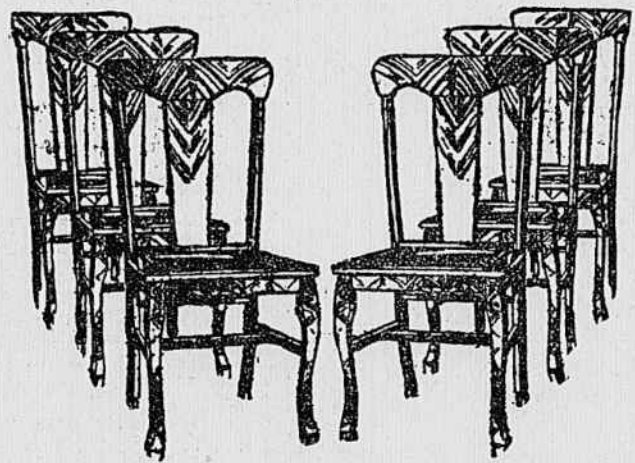


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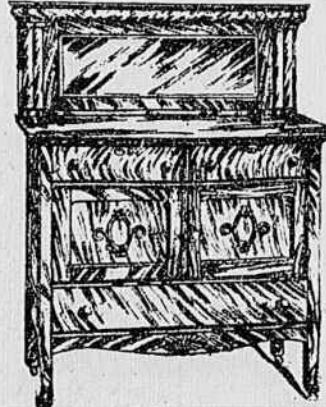
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